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ABSTRACT

Little research has investigated the effects of school restructuring on the roles of central office administrators, particularly the superintendent. This paper presents findings of a study that examined the perceptions of superintendents in Kentucky, whose State Legislature passed a statewide systemic reform initiative, the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990. A survey of 176 Kentucky superintendents elicited 74 usable responses, a 42 percent response rate. Three themes emerged from the data that defined the changing role of the superintendency: (1) developing community; (2) coaching from the sidelines; and (3) struggling to meet the KERA standards. The findings do not support the view that superintendents will evolve into "stewards of a radically expanded and more complex enterprise" (Cunningham 1990). Nor do the data support the belief that superintendents are unaffected by restructuring activity, or that they are being pushed off the main stage of school leadership and management. Rather, it appears that new superintendent roles are emerging. Contains 88 references. (LMI)

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The Changing Role of the Superintendency in Restructuring Districts in Kentucky[1]

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AERA
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> I see my work as being in the center of, perhaps, the most wide-sweeping educational reform in the history of this state . . . It is an exciting time to be a superintendent. In all probability, the singularly most important aspect in the success or failure of restructuring and reform is the attitude displayed by the office of the superintendent. [68][2]

Since the mid-1980s, major efforts to reform American education have been unfolding under the "diffuse" (Mitchell & Beach, 1993, p. 250) banner of school restructuring. Growing out of needs to enhance educational productivity, overhaul a deteriorating social infrastructure, and transport education into the post-industrial world, and as a counterpoint to the top-down reforms of the standards raising movement of the early 1980s (Murphy, 1991; 1992a), "a wide variety of reform proposals" (Elmore, 1991, p. 2) are finding a home under the "big tent" (Barth, 1991, p. 123), "magic incantation" (Tyack, 1990, p. 170), or "smorgasbord of ideas and programs" (Rowley, 1992, p. 3), known as school restructuring.[3] Chief among these are initiatives to: (1) expand opportunities for parents to play a more vital role in the education of their children, especially proposals to enhance parental voice and choice; (2) decentralize control over education from the state through the district to the individual school community; (3) professionalize teaching, both at the state and federal levels and at each individual school site; (4) replace the behavioral underpinnings of learning and

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teaching with constructivist principles; and (5) infuse more market sensitive measures of accountability into the schooling process, while de-emphasizing historically-entrenched bureaucratic controls (Murphy, 1992b; 1993a).

Central to this agenda for reform are alterations in the roles of all educational stakeholders. While a good deal of conceptual work, and some empirical analyses, have been devoted to the topic of role changes for teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and students at the school level--and a variety of actors at the state level--considerably less is known about the effects of restructuring on the roles of central office administrators, and about the impact that district personnel may have on tranformational reform initiatives (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Fernandez, in press; Wardzala, 1993). Concomitantly, little attention has been given in the current era of reform "to the improvement of practice at the central level of schooling" (Crowson, 1988, p. 1). Empirical data to inform discussions and improvement plans on these issues are troublesomely thin indeed.[4] What information is available is focused on what "districts should not be doing . . . but [provides] little sense of what the new role should be" (Fullan, 1993, p. 145, emphasis in original). "What attention topmost management in local education has received of late has usually been wrapped within sets of decentralization initiatives" (Crowson, 1988, p. 1). As a result, there is considerable "ambiguity and ambivalence" (Fullan, 1993, p. 145) among central

office personnel about their roles in restructuring school districts.

It was in an effort to provide insights on these issues that the study reported herein was undertaken. In this article, the spotlight is on one dimension of central office operations, the changing role of the superintendent. Because the superintendency is ensconced in the larger context of the central office, the next part of this introductory section provides an overview of what is known about district office operations in restructuring districts. The introductory material concludes with an analysis of four possible options for the superintendency under transformational reform efforts. The second section of the paper discusses the procedures that informed our investigation. Analysis and discussion of results comprise the final section of the article.

Changes at the District Office Level

> Significant changes in teaching and learning require significant changes in schools. And these changes will succeed only if central-office administrators possess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support a new vision of schooling and allow them to provide valued support to the schools they serve. (Hirsh & Sparks, 1991, p. 19)

In general, the policy environment of schools is shifting toward much greater attention to student learning in academic subjects, toward more ambitious goals for what all students will learn in schools, and toward much greater

> school-level accountability for results. These shifts portend significant challenges to the traditional role of local districts. (Elmore, n.d., p. 7)

Because superintendents serve as chief executive officers of school districts, it is useful in assessing potential changes in this role to review the limited amount of available literature that reveals how central offices are responding to the restructuring initiatives noted above, especially to the decentralization aspects of reform. To begin with, given the evolution of a policy agenda that underscores the responsibilities of state and local school site actors (Murphy, 1990), "the role of local districts arguably becomes more problematic" (Elmore, n.d., p. 4). There is an absence of a "clearly-defined role" (p. 4) for district offices and "chief executive officers in local education feel themselves to be caught in the middle . . . between state authority and local autonomy" (Crowson, 1988, p. 3; see also Murphy, 1993b).

From this starting point, reformers tend to follow either of two distinct conceptual paths in arriving at an appropriate role for central office personnel in restructuring school districts. One group of analysts maintain that local districts have outlived their usefulness and should be done away with altogether, along with their governing structure--local boards of education (Olson, 1992a):

> Sound educational reform in the 1990s would move a number of key decisions up to the states and devolve practically all

> the rest to individual schools and parents. What then is the point--or function--of the bulky layers of middle management associated with "local" education agencies: Those 13,000 superintendents, 96,000 school board members, and the bureaucracies [district offices] that serve them? (Finn, 1991, p. 181)

On one front, reformers in this group assert the desirability and appropriateness of a reconstituted policy environment in which the spotlight is focused on state support of individual school sites:

> So a system of locally centralized governance and administration of public education was well-suited [to] the particular conditions of a developing nation. It is much less clear that such a system is well-suited, or necessary to present conditions. . . . (Elmore, n.d., p. 9)

At the same time, they draw energy for their position from the literature which demonstrates that a mushrooming centralized bureaucracy (Thompson, 1986) lies at the heart of problems confronting schools (Clark & Meloy, 1989; McNeil, 1988; Sizer, 1984). They suggest that because district bureaucrats have much to lose, they will act to block meaningful reform (Chubb, 1988; Finn, 1991). Embedded in the writings of these reformers is the worry that the bureaucrats are more likely to reshape reform "to maintain the equilibrium from which they all profit" (Finn, 1991, p. 182) than to embrace reform strategies that lead to meaningful

restructuring of central operations (see Brown, 1992; Wardzala, 1993).

A second group of analysts suggest a different scenario altogether--a continuing but restructured role for district offices:

> Do the revolutionary changes . . . render central administration irrelevant and unnecessary? Quite the contrary. Indeed, while the role of the central administration is turned upside down, its importance is diminished not one whit. (Clinchy, 1989, p. 293)

Reformers in this camp tend to find the logic of their colleagues in the former group somewhat "simplistic" (Elmore, n.d., p. 11). They maintain that district office stakeholders are, like their peers at the school level, simply "faced with new roles, which are more complex, less clear, and require new skills on their part" (Fullan, 1993, p. 159). From a positive vantage point, these scholars rely heavily on evidence about the importance of district assistance in successful local improvement efforts (Murphy & Hallinger, 1993; Wardzala, 1993). They believe that transforming the functions and responsibilities of district personnel consistent with the restructured roles of principals, teachers, students, and parents augurs well for school improvement. They also point to the potential dangers, especially to the equity agenda of education, if over 100,000 schools were cut loose to chart their own course (Watt, 1989).

What does research tell us about how district offices actually are being impacted by initiatives to restructure schooling? Activities consistent with the agendas of both groups of reformers are discernable. The more radical measures--i.e. the elimination of central bureaucracies--are of a rather recent vintage. The death knell for district hierarchies, however, is clearly available within the Grant Maintained Schools movement in the United Kingdom, the radical devolution agenda in Australia, and the charter school movement in the United States. While still in their infancy,[5] these reform efforts represent new structural arrangements for school governance, structures that largely relegate central educational bureaucracies in the post-industrial era to obscurity at best and extinction at worst--or best, depending on your viewpoint.[6]

Concomitantly, efforts are underway in a variety of communities to overhaul district operations to support school-based reform efforts. Reports on restructuring districts reveal shifts in the purpose, structure, and nature of the work of central offices.

Purpose. Carlson (1989) captures the prevailing change in purpose as follows:

> The central office must come to see itself not as a regulator or initiator but as a service provider. The primary function of the central office must be to assure that individual schools have what they need to be successful. (p. 3)

The main purpose of the central office thus becomes "serving and assisting schools" (Chapman & Boyd, 1986, p. 34). In meeting this new objective in restructuring districts, as Hirsh and Sparks (1991) state, "central office departments are shifting from monitoring and regulating agencies to service centers for schools" (p. 16; see also David, 1989). For example, in Riverside, California, "the central office became involved in aiding, rather than controlling, the daily work of the school" (Wissler & Ortiz, 1988, p. 84). Adapting to this new mission is causing districts to move from being "sole-source provider[s] of services to . . . vendor[s] competing in the open market" (Detroit Public School Empowerment Plan, cited in Olson, 1992d, p. 5). "In effect, central support functions [are] no longer cost centers within the district, but enterprise funds, expected to finance their own operations" (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992, p. 543).

Structure. Consistent with their newly emerging mission, central offices in restructuring districts are undergoing four types of structural change. In some cases, most often in large, heavily centralized districts, there has been a dismantling of the larger bureaucracy into regional units. For example, in the late 1980s the superintendent of Milwaukee "decentralized the school bureaucracy by dividing the district into six 'service delivery areas'" (Olson, 1990, p. 15). In order to "increase broad-based representation in decision-making at the school level," the Dade County public school system restructured from

four administrative offices into six regional ones (Fernandez, 1989, pp. 26-27). In Cincinnati, "the district's 80 schools [were reorganized] into nine 'mini-districts' consisting of a high school, middle school, and six or seven elementary schools" (Gursky, 1992, p. 13). In Dallas, the district's schools were divided into eight K-12 zones at the start of the 1992-1993 school year (Olson, 1991a).

A reduction in size of central office staff is a second type of structural change sometimes found in restructuring districts, often accompanied by the elimination of entire layers of the central hierarchy.[7] For example, the first year of the Chicago Reform Act (1988-1989) saw a 20 percent reduction in central office staff, from 3000 positions to 2660 positions (Designs for Change, 1991). In Dallas, two layers of the bureaucracy were removed when one deputy superintendent replaced two associate superintendents and the assistant superintendents for elementary and secondary education (Olson, 1991a). In May 1992, the superintendent of Cincinnati, J. Michael Brandt, in order "to improve direct services to children," reduced "the number of central office administrators from 127 to 62. In addition, 27 non-administrative support-staff positions [were] eliminated, as were 50 clerical jobs" (Gursky, 1992, p. 1). This streamlining was accompanied by a flattening of the organizational structure. Specifically, "several layers of the bureaucracy, including the district's area superintendents and the entire department of administration, curriculum, and instruction" (Gursky, 1991,

p. 13) were eliminated. In Chaska, Minnesota, district restructuring also produced a "flattened-out-model" of organizational structure (King & Ericson, 1992, p. 119). In Milwaukee, all associate superintendent positions were eliminated (Clear, 1990) and in Dade County, the transformation of the educational system resulted in "fewer middle-management positions and the reassignment of area personnel to feeder patterns" (Dreyfuss, Cistone, & Divita, 1992, p. 91).[8]

Third, employees who previously occupied middle-management roles at the district office are sometimes reassigned to support activities in individual schools. In other cases, the money used to fund these positions is freed up to support new initiatives at the site level (Sickler, 1988).[9] In Chicago, "the redirection in central office staff [340 positions] generated 40 million, which was shifted to the schools" (Designs for Change, 1991, p. 4). The streamlining of staff in Cincinnati is expected to save $16 million over the 1992-1993 and 1993-1994 school years, all of which is targeted to flow "directly to schools" (Gursky, 1992, p. 1). In addition, many of the former Cincinnati central office administrators who do not retire "will move to school-based positions" (p. 13).

Finally, as this "flattening of the hierarchical structure" (Zwyine et al., 1991, p. 10) occurs, responsibilities and tasks historically housed at the district office level are often transferred to schools (Lindelow, 1981) and "functions that are currently centralized [are] spread over a larger number of

people" (Thompson, 1988, p. 15). Consistent with the shifting purpose discussed earlier, the job of "middle managers becomes more focused on providing services directly to schools" (David, 1989, p. 29).

Nature of the work. What empirical evidence do we have about the nature of the work being performed by district office personnel in restructuring districts? We know that for many employees there is a palpable sense of loss associated with restructuring (Brown, 1992; Murphy, 1993c), a sense of loss rooted in a diminished sense of authority (Smith & O'Day, 1990; Thompson, 1986), influence (Wissler & Ortiz, 1988), power (Brown, 1992), control (Clear, 1990), and status (Stoll & Fink, 1992), as well as in a perceived distancing in the relationship between central office personnel and school staff (Murphy, 1993b).[10] Not unexpectedly, because these new conditions are often "scary for a central office" (Sommerfeld, 1992, p. 10) and because district staff often feel left "on the fringes" (Stoll & Fink, 1992, p. 34) and "off-balance" (McPherson & Crowson, 1992, p. 3), many district employees have "a particular difficulty accommodating decentralization" (Brown, 1991, p. 78).

There is evidence that the central feature of change in the nature of central office work is away from "traditional roles of director, controller, and monitor to enabler, facilitator, and helper" (Mojkowski & Bamberger, 1991, p. 51), a shift that matches earlier calls for rethinking district roles (Cuban, 1984; Kearnes, 1988; J. T. Murphy, 1989). Consistent with the

redefined purpose of district activity discussed earlier, some central office departments are becoming service centers for schools (Hirsh & Sparks, 1991), what Wohlstetter and Odden refer to as a "help giver organization" (1992, p. 538). For example, in the Halton School Board restructuring has required central office support staff "to think and behave as service providers to teachers in schools, as opposed to deliverers of policy and procedure" (Stoll & Fink, 1992, p. 34).[11] In Milwaukee, the central focus of district managers became "developmental assistance" (Clear, 1990, p. 4). This movement from a bureaucratic management style to a service orientation is also occurring in restructuring districts in Kentucky (Murphy, 1993b). In helping support transformational reforms, the function of central office personnel changes from attempting to ensure uniformity across schools to "orchestrat[ing] diversity to ensure that the common educational goals of the system are met, even if in many different ways" (Schneider, cited in Clinchy, 1989, p. 293; see also Wardzala, 1993; Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992)--a change that one superintendent describes as moving from managing a school system to developing a system of schools (Murphy, 1993b).

Central office personnel in restructuring districts are spending less time "initiating projects in schools" and are "respond[ing] to school requests most of the time" (Brown, 1991, p. 78). They are serving as "liaisons between the building and central office and act[ing] as 'brokers' of central-office

services" (Hirsh & Sparks, 1991, p. 16). In one sample of restructuring districts in Kentucky, the central office facilitative role--the "new role of supporting school decision making" (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992, p. 545)--has meant less emphasis on telling, more advisory work and consultation, additional legwork in securing information for schools, and becoming more of a transmitter of information rather than a developer of strategies (Murphy, 1993b). In Riverside, California, decentralization "as it involved central office changed communications patterns inside and outside the office to one of listening; changed decision-making to consensus; [and] changed workstyle to facilitation" (Wissler & Ortiz, 1988, pp. 94-95). In a third district in the Midwest, restructuring caused central administrators to begin managing and leading in more of a partnership arrangement with teachers, rather than as initiators or directors (Smylie, 1991; see also Stoll & Fink, 1992). There was "a shift from unilateral to shared decision making for district administrators" (Smylie, 1991, p. 17). "[D]istrict administrators' interests shift[ed] from controlling information to ensuring that it was available to everyone" (p. 14). Not surprisingly, there was a "leveling of work roles" (p. 16) throughout the district.

Possibilities for the Superintendency

It is now close to the twenty-first century, and those who would improve American schools in the coming decades should

have a clearer perspective on the role of superintendents. (Cuban, 1989, p. 270)

> As power and knowledge become more dispersed, as schooling becomes more decentralized and professionalized, some gentler, less heroic images of the superintendent's job are required to accompany these hard, masculine images of the tough top down manager who has the answers. (J. T. Murphy, 1990, p. 4)

Given the agenda of transformational change in education generally and the preliminary evidence we have about revisions in district office operations in restructuring districts, it is instructive to hypothesize about possible alterations in the responsibilities of superintendents. It seems to us that at least four scenarios are possible. To begin with, it is not inconceivable that there will be little or no change in the role. The rationale here is well known to students of educational change. Reform movements such as restructuring wash over schooling on a cyclical basis (Cuban, 1990; Passow, 1984; Warren, 1990). Unfortunately--or fortunately, depending upon one's perspective--for a variety of reasons discussed elsewhere (Murphy, 1989), these reform movements often leave the fundamental elements of education, including role sets and the authority on which they are based, largely unchanged (see Cohen, 1988; Cuban, 1990; Elmore, 1987; Tyack, 1990). Given these basic dynamics, one would not expect to see considerable change in the role of the superintendent in school systems of the future.

Following the two lines of analysis applied to district offices above--their elimination or transformation--brings us to our other possibilities for the superintendency. If the logic supporting dismantling district offices holds--the belief that they are a vestige of governmental arrangements that lack relevance in a post-industrial world and certainly are not to be trusted to distribute power downward to the school site and outward to the community--then there is little need for school superintendents. Here then is our second scenario: the demise of the superintendency. Just such a proposal to address the crisis in the big-city superintendency was recently raised by Glazer (1992): "the wiser course would have recognized that the big-city school superintendency is broken, it can't be fixed, and the question now is, how do we get out from under it, and its attendant bureaucracy?" (p. 36). It does not take a large leap in the analysis to extend this question to the superintendency in general. Radical decentralization, as in the case of charter schools, if allowed to run its course, will lead to the evolution of new governing structures in which a substantive role for a superintendent will be conspicuous by its absence.

Turning to the proposals of the second group of reformers, those who maintain that the roles and activities of district administrators should be restructured to better match transformational change efforts occurring at the local school level, brings us to our final two scenarios for the superintendency. It is possible that, like principals, students,

teachers, and parents, superintendents will find their roles fundamentally redefined in districts undergoing restructuring efforts (J. T. Murphy, 1989; Wardzala, 1993). There will be "changed images of top-executive leadership alongside new visions of school-site autonomy and teacher-professionalism" (Crowson, 1988, p. 1). The available empirical evidence, scant as it is (Murphy, 1993b), hints that it would be premature to discard this portrait of the superintendency in tomorrow's schools, especially in the turbulent period characterizing the movement from an industrial to a post-industrial school system.

The final possibility for the superintendency is actually a variation of the third: the superintendency will undergo not a restructuring--as in our third scenario--but a metamorphosis. The role would not be overhauled so much as it would be totally transformed. This scenario is supported by the scholarship of Luvern Cunningham (1990), who writes of the need "to forego our attachment to the school district and its mission of schooling and bond with the larger and, in the long run, more important value of well-being" (p. 149). Given this more expansive conception of public service, it is possible that the occupants of the superintendency will evolve into "stewards of a radically expanded and more complex enterprise" (p. 151).

Procedures

The first task was to select districts involved in serious transformational reform efforts. Given the slowness of the restructuring movement to affect central office operations in the

United States (Murphy, 1991), we decided to focus on a state in which considerable legal, political, and community pressure had been brought to bear to radically overhaul schooling from the classroom to the state house. Because it is generally acknowledged that the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA) represents the best example of statewide systemic reform of the restructuring variety, districts in that state were targeted.

At the time of this investigation, there were 176 districts in Kentucky. The entire group was selected for this study. The target group was comprised of the superintendents in these districts.

A questionnaire was developed for these chief executive officers that tapped into five broad topic areas, asking for their insights about: (1) the major purposes of restructuring in Kentucky; (2) the effects of restructuring; (3) the ways in which restructuring was shaping the superintendent's role; (4) changes in district office operations and roles as a result of restructuring; and (5) "the good, the bad, and the bothersome" about transformational change efforts in Kentucky.

Eleven open-ended questions were developed around these five topics. Responses were received from 78 superintendents, 74 (42%) of which were usable--a somewhat higher rate of return than expected, given the open-ended nature of the instrument.

For purposes of this paper, data from questionnaire protocols were analyzed to discern superintendents' perceptions

of changes unfolding in district offices and in the role of the superintendency. Procedures described by Miles and Huberman (1984) were followed. The questionnaire data--comprised of phrases, sentences, and paragraphs in response to the 11 open-ended probes--were coded like interview transcriptions. Pattern coding and the construction of conceptually clustered matrices formed the heart of the analysis. This comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) allowed for the construction of domains and a taxonomy as well as development of themes across the sample (Spradley, 1980). A discussion of the results of this work follows.

Results

> The work is very challenging and rewarding. There is more teamwork, group decision making, sharing of authority and responsibility [which] are vital to the success of the total program. [39]
>
> The superintendent's role is changing thus the relationship with the different groups. [65]
>
> I am having to re-learn 25 years of experience. [41]

Three themes emerge from the analysis of the changing role of the superintendency in restructuring districts in Kentucky: developing community; coaching from the sidelines; and struggling to meet the KERA mandates.

Developing Community

> It [restructuring] has "leveled the playing field" and made everyone more able to share experiences and problems. I am

trying to "count" on others more, and I am trying to be there more for others. [41]

Sometimes we laugh together and sometimes we cry, but we are all together. [1]

Many of the superintendents in this study see their roles changing in a similar way--from managers of an organization to developers of a community of professionals. While the community development model does not apply to all superintendents in this study, while many are struggling to come to terms with what this shift means for their roles, and while the evolution is still in its infancy, a community theme does characterize many of the responses provided by these chief executive officers. It is most evident in two clusters of activity: nurturing the involvement of others in shaping district operations and promoting shared decision making.

Nurturing involvement. There is consensus that the restructuring agenda of the KERA has changed the rules of the schooling game in Kentucky:

Restructuring has served to involve more people in the decision making process than ever before [68].

It [restructuring] is an open door for involvement of parents and teachers to be a part of the solution rather than the problem [9].

Shared decision making gets more people involved with each school [61].

All activities require more involvement [17].

Superintendents, in turn, see their roles changing to address the challenges of opening up schooling to "meet a new set of participants" [38] or "players" [29] and of incorporating "more input from a variety of interest groups" [36]:

> I have devoted my own time and the collective time, talent, and wisdom of this district to the business of developing new and different ways of involving employees, parents, and the community in the life and work of our schools. [31]
>
> In thinking about the work of a superintendent, you must make more plans and remember to establish a structure so that many more people are involved. [26]
>
> The role of the superintendent, I think, has changed. Superintendents must now take the time to inform as many people as possible and to involve as many people as possible. [68]

As noted below, a "team approach" [2] is a preferred vehicle for "involving others--staff and community" [2].

Promoting shared decision making. The KERA was designed to produce "less decision making in the central office and board room" [43] and to give "more authority for day-to-day decisions to the individual schools" [39]. Nearly all the administrators in this study believe that this design principle has profound implications for their own roles, for some in the way they conceptualize leadership, and for most in the way they manage routine district operations. There is near unanimity that "all superintendents' leadership styles, out of necessity, [will]

become participatory." Comments about "adjusting . . . management style to share decision making in our district" [72] are common:

> It has allowed me to think outside the box, to encourage experimentation and to promote decentralized decision making. [24]
>
> My role has changed in that restructuring entails sharing power that previously was concentrated in the superintendent's office. [31]
>
> Adopting management style to accommodate S[ite] B[ased] D[ecision] M[aking]. Broadening base of participation in management. [33]

Promoting "active sharing of decision making with individual schools" [37] means specific things to these chief executive officers. It suggests: "focusing on shifts from central to site based decisions" [9]; being "more open to input from staff, parents, and community" [69]; "utiliz[ing] and depend[ing] on all staff to a greater extent" [40]; relying "a great deal on the expertise, knowledge, and opinions of others [68]; "more collaboration/group problem solving" [73]; "work[ing] more with others" [58]; and, through collaboration and negotiation, a search for "consensus" [19] in decision areas that were previously the purview of the superintendent.

Although these superintendents are able to discern some advantages of more collaborative decision making--the development of "closer working relationships" with schools [39], the

devolution of "responsibility" [29] and "accountability" [23] to those closest to the learner, and a "new respect and appreciation for others" [72] growing out of cooperative work--they are acutely aware of difficulties as well.[12] A lack of clarity--"uncertainty and unanswered questions" [68]--about the decision process is noted. Start-up problems in "defining roles and being sure that everyone that should be is involved in the decision process" [59] are frustrating some superintendents. Nearly all are troubled by the amount of "meeting time" [68]--"the time needed to involve others in decision making" [58]. Some perceive "strained relationships" [59] with others in the central office and at the school site. Many are actively struggling with the loss of personal authority and influence that accompanies shared decision making:

> In my case, I feel somewhat tertiary, rather than at the helm of my district. [56]
>
> Less control in making change happen. [59]

Many superintendents find the loss of influence over school-level personnel decisions particularly disheartening:

> Superintendents do not have enough say about how and which new principals are hired. [3]
>
> Less choice in decisions, e.g. personnel--where the school council selects the new principal. [29]
>
> I have always felt that the main way a superintendent could affect a school district was through the teachers and other employees he employed. Now with restructuring, which

brought about school councils, superintendents do not select the employees. [60]

In addition, they appear to be particularly concerned about two sets of dynamics: (1) the support expected from them for what they sometimes view as inappropriate decision making by recently empowered groups at the local level--

> I have felt like I set the tone for our district in the past and now the site based councils can take their schools in directions that I have learned by experience is the wrong way. [11]
>
> Stressful--greater responsibility with less means of managing destiny. Sideline view of letting people make mistakes without interfering is not good for material items, but is inexcusable when students and teachers are involved. [44]
>
> I am asked to sell, support, and promote something that I am unsure of and have limited knowledge of [19]--

and (2) losing decision making power but maintaining responsibility for the outcomes of those decisions[13]--

> I'm still accountable for my district, however, in many cases--I'm not part of the decision making process. [56]

It certainly makes me question my decisions more. I feel I have the same responsibility but less authority. [41]

Coaching from the Sidelines[14]

The leadership has to be there, but the relationships are changing . . . The old dictator superintendent will be a thing of the past if restructuring is successful. [71]

In general the superintendent's position will never be the same . . . the superintendent is being transformed to providing service. [65]

An evolving conception of leadership. There is agreement among these district administrators that, for better or worse, if they are to be successful in the restructured educational system envisioned in the KERA, their views of leadership and methods of leading will need to change. Most are struggling, often in what they judge to be a hostile state climate, to move from the more traditional conception of the superintendent as the person controlling the district from the apex of the organizational hierarchy--from the formal "position" [45] as "the main educational decision maker for the district" [55]--to a view of the superintendent as a "support service" [65] and "facilitator" [5] and to a focus on exerting influence through "persuasion [and] expertise" [45]. While a few express concern that they are expected to be little more than "director[s] of mandated programs" [66], many others see their role evolving to encompass "much more of an emphasis on leadership" [50]. This group maintains that,

> [w]hile the superintendency has always required both leadership and management skills, leadership becomes more critical when a district is attempting to implement systemic change. [31]

Given the comprehensive nature of educational reform in Kentucky, it is not surprising that this latter group argues that the "KERA calls upon greater leadership skills from the superintendent" [52]: "The work is challenging because the methods used previously have been altered. You seem to be changing from a role as 'boss' to a role as 'leader'" [58]. While performing as "a leader rather than a manager" [34] means different things to these chief executives, the change often entails an enhanced focus on dealing "with larger issues" [32], "starting up new programs" [47], "giving time to vision and mission" [34], "set[ting] the pace" [58], and "becoming more of a policy maker" [55].

An altered conception of leadership for these school superintendents also means new methods of administering their organizations. As noted earlier, the leadership role they see evolving is less hierarchically grounded. Because they maintain that "traditional chains of command simply will not allow the system to evolve as rapidly as it needs to move and adjust" [24], they do not see themselves so much as "driv[ing]" [29] the system, as they do as "explaining, selling, and convincing" [29]; "passing [accountability] down to middle management and staff"

[33]; and "overseeing the operations [while making] fewer decisions" [48]:

> I find that I must work harder to not enforce my opinions on others. I also must see that I'm not perceived as "the superintendent" who demands but who works with "you" to get "it" done. [13]

The leadership style they see taking root is one that: is "less directive and more open to collaborative efforts" [50]; offers "looser control" [23]; spotlights delegation and devolution; and is concerned more with the development of others than with the promotion of self--"in fact, I would not consider myself successful if the superintendent's power grew during restructuring" [31]. In short, they describe an empowering rather than a controlling style of administration.

Facilitation and support. Two concepts--facilitation and support--are at the core of the "coaching from the sidelines" theme extracted from the insights provided by the 74 school leaders in this study.[15] "Mov[ing] to an enabler-facilitator" [33, 62] role includes most centrally the notion of the superintendent as the "organizer and facilitator of information rather than the source of knowledge" [9]. It also entails "listening" [41] more than talking, "acting as a model of appropriate activity" [17], and "becom[ing] more of a salesman, coordinator of groups, and an agent of change" [69].

Support, in turn, is comprised of three major dimensions or sets of activities. The first is encouraging risk taking, being

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"an encourager of people as attempts at change are being made" [15]--"creat[ing] a climate where people are encouraged to take risks and where they are rewarded for developing new solutions" [31]. A second bundle of support activities concerns educating staff and community representatives--"teaching others to perform new roles . . . to do the things that you [the superintendent] have been doing for many years" [26]. "Broker[ing] centrally based services" [73] to schools, especially "training" [34] and other related "development" [73] activities is a third new role expectation for these superintendents in the area of support.

Struggling to Meet the KERA Mandates

> KERA has provided a positive stimulation in terms of my confidence in public education. I am convinced more than ever that public education can be successful and that KERA will be one of the primary influences in causing that success. [52]
>
> I no longer see myself as a change agent. In Kentucky, our role is to oversee the implementation of the law, not to play much of a direct part in bringing about change. In many respects it has taken the challenge out of the superintendency. [21]

While these district administrators occasionally address the substance of the KERA mandates--"developing regulations" [10], "spend[ing] more time with educational duties" [11]--the predominate sense one culls from the questionnaire data is one of superintendents (and their districts) struggling mightily with

the process of change. Three sub-themes characterize these endeavors: facilitating a redirection in educational goals toward those embedded in the KERA; dealing with the strain of "radical change" [66] efforts; and grappling with the implications of reform for the superintendency itself.

Facilitating redirection. It is interesting that in a reform movement that is generally regarded as being designed to bypass the central office, district superintendents often consider themselves on the point in efforts to help individual schools develop understandings about the purposes and components of the KERA. For those superintendents who consider themselves as "director[s] of mandated programs" [66], this is a rather straightforward managerial process, albeit one that is not embraced with much enthusiasm. Many others, however, see considerable ambiguity in the reform agenda. They maintain that "the state is somewhat floundering with its new approaches" [65]. In this environment, they perceive a good deal of maneuverability and room for leadership and discern the "important role that [they] must play during the first years of implementation of the reform efforts in Kentucky" [11].

For superintendents in both groups, it is clear that the KERA has rearranged their own work agendas:

> Spend more time assuring compliance with statutes and regulations. [17]

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> I find myself spending less time on becoming knowledgeable about trends such as Total Quality Management since our agenda in Kentucky is dictated by the Reform Act. [21]
>
> More concern for legislative and State Department of Education mandates. [33]

They spend more time: "keeping up to date on KERA initiatives" [53] and "new changes" [41]; "trying to understand the requirements of KERA" [22]; "keep[ing] informed of the new programs and how to implement them" [72]; "deciphering directives from the state" [65]; and "inform[ing] all others of all aspects of the restructuring process" [68].

Dealing with change. Although a minority of these administrators would agree with their colleague who suggests that "once you survive the shock [of the KERA], getting on with it is not that bad" [19], most perceive the amount of change in the reform process as "tremendous" [18] and "overwhelming" [34]. Their concerns are compounded by what they see as unreasonably short timelines to implement reforms and demonstrate success, "by the magnitude of what needs to be accomplished and is expected of us in a brief timeframe" [56]:

> Too much has been undertaken too quickly. [51]
>
> The timeline for implementing the restructuring efforts (KERA) is too demanding. (Too much too soon!) [2]
>
> Overwhelming--asking principals and teachers to do too much too quickly--losing good people who should be given time to adjust. [34]

In addition to concern about the overall timeframe for the implementation of improvements, superintendents are troubled by a lack of time to undertake the daily work of reform. On the one hand, additional activities requiring more time are clearly discernable:

> Requires more time, more paperwork (forms, etc.). Having to spend too much time in meetings rather than time-on-task. [47]
>
> Much more time is now required to make most decisions. [36]
>
> The superintendency has a tremendous workload. The demand on your time is great. [30]
>
> Has dictated that meetings with committees, administrators, public etc. take place . . . demands on time are immense. [40]

On the other hand, within the context of already busy schedules, superintendents do not believe that they have the time required to undertake these added activities:

> Do not have the time needed for working with administrative staff and teachers. [47]
>
> There is not enough time to do the necessary planning needed for the successful implementation of KERA. [2]
>
> Not enough time for all the planning, committee work, and communications involved with such rapid change. [18]

As we note again later, considerable pressure and stress are accompanying efforts to induce change of this magnitude in too little time:

Tremendous amount of change has been necessary on the part of board members, administrators, teachers, and superintendents. [18]

Change is a very stressful and traumatic happening for most people. When we proceed in uncharted waters we are always fearful of running aground or sinking. We hope we do not sink! [43]

Rapid changes have created pressures. [37]

Personal adjustments. There is consensus among these 74 chief executive officers that the KERA has "made the role of the superintendent much harder" [54] and much more "demanding" [61], in many cases actually requiring "learning the job over" [40]. They portray a role that is becoming "much busier" [74] as the "workload has multiplied" [62] and "additional responsibilities" [55] have been added:

There is a lot more work because of the many programs and services that have been added as a result of KERA. [63]

I have many additional responsibilities for training and implementing new laws and programs. [42]

Restructuring has made our job much busier. Just understanding the change and providing leadership for changing has sometimes been difficult to do. [71]

My workload has multiplied. I work late into the afternoon, many nights and every Saturday and Sunday morning. The responsibility put on us to affect change demands the extra time. [62]

The environment in which the KERA was conceived and is being implemented, however, is not one that encourages these superintendents to embrace their added responsibilities readily. They argue that the "KERA was born on a wave of anti-[central office] administration feeling statewide" [4] and that people are "trying to justify the reform by publicly demoralizing superintendents and school boards" [57]. The sentiment that the KERA and its subsequent implementation are placing superintendents "at a disadvantage in relationships" [48] with their employees and employers is evident in the responses of these district administrators. Moreover, they perceive "little support" [74] and goodwill flowing from the Kentucky Department of Education. In short, they see themselves being cast as villains in the drama of school improvement unfolding in Kentucky. For many, this dynamic keeps them "on guard" [57] much of the time and inhibits their eagerness to put themselves on the line for educational reform.

Concomitantly, as individuals, these superintendents struggle with doubts about "a lack of belief in many parts of KERA" [44] and about how best to "present a positive image" [62] or "stress the positives" [57] about reforms with which they do not agree. They worry simultaneously about the evolution of the superintendent's role into that of "a glorified, highly paid clerk" [62] and the taking on of "responsibility [that] sometimes seems overwhelming" [71]. They express concern about the "higher

stress" [66] and "added pressure" [49] that accompany change. For many, there is more frustration and less joy in the role:

> My work is not enjoyable today compared to 4-5 years ago! [54]
>
> I feel frustrated most of the time. Certainly not as enjoyable as the first four years. Fearful of making a mistake. [59]
>
> Has made it sometimes difficult to want to go to work, due to tremendous time commitment necessary to institute all facets of restructuring in Kentucky. [40]
>
> All I think about is retiring and letting someone else figure out how you unscramble an egg. [46]

And they struggle to make sense of all this in light of both their added responsibilities and their reduced authority and respect:

Conclusion

> What we are witnessing . . . is part of a continuing struggle . . . to establish a workable concept of what the superintendency is all about. This struggle, at its roots, involves questions of power distribution, expertise, deep-seated values, fiscal management, and ultimately, one might suspect, the character of a school system in American society. (Blumberg, 1985, p. 24)

The continuing effort to establish a workable concept of the superintendency to which Blumberg refers has been heightened by the recent round of educational reforms that cluster under the

rubric of school restructuring. While the struggle is evident in districts throughout the United States, perhaps nowhere is the adventure being conducted so thoroughly or on such a massive scale as in Kentucky--where the KERA of 1990 has simultaneously decentralized control over education to local communities, expanded opportunities for parents to play a central role in the education of their children, and redefined (somewhat) instructional strategies around constructivist views of learning.

What do the data from the chief executive officers of Kentucky's school districts tell us about the struggle to forge a workable concept of the superintendency for restructuring schools? Specifically, what light do they shed on the framework of "possibilities for the superintendency" presented in the introduction? To begin with, there is almost no support in these data for the view that superintendents will evolve into "stewards of a radically expanded and more complex [social service] enterprise" (Cunningham, 1990, p. 151). There is also little support for the belief that superintendents are riding out the restructuring movement unaffected by the vortex of activity that surrounds them. Finally, there is little evidence that, even in a somewhat anti-central administration environment, superintendents are being pushed off the main stage of school leadership and management. Rather, it appears that new roles are emerging. As we reported throughout the paper, these roles are being played out with varying degrees of alacrity and reluctance.

Notes

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[2]The numbers refer to the 74 superintendents completing the questionnaire.

[3]The benefits of keeping the definition of restructuring somewhat vague have been discussed by Mitchell and Beach (1991) and Rowley (1992).

[4]This is part of an historical lack of attention to the study of the superintendency (Bridges, 1982; Crowson, 1987; Crowson & Morris, 1991; Dimmock & Wildy, 1992).

[5]For example, the first charter school in the United States, City Academy in St. Paul, Minnesota, began operation at the start of the 1992-93 school year (Olson, 1992b; 1992c).

[6]At this point it is worth recalling Cuban's (1989) maxim on school reform: "Notions of improvement are in the heads of the

beholders; a change that appears as progress to one person may appear to another as a disaster" (p. 252).

[7]At the same time, it is important to note that, at least in some districts--in many Kentucky districts, for example--the expanded responsibilities of managing systemic reform efforts are adding tasks at the district level. Not surprisingly, there is--at least on the part of superintendents--a perceived need for enhanced district office staffing (Murphy, 1993b; 1993c).

[8]For a variety of reasons grouped under what Spring (1988) labels the "politics of bureaucracy" (p. 6; see also Downs, 1967; Finn, 1991), streamlining is often more easily accomplished on paper than in reality, as Washington, D.C. officials discovered recently when they attempted to downsize central office operations (Olson, 1991b).

[9]This is not always the case, however. For example, in Milwaukee "the reorganization did not result in a cost savings. It actually resulted in a net increase" (Clear, 1990, p. 4).

[10]At least one study, however, found an opposite pattern; that is, restructuring led to greater interdependence among teachers and district administrators (Smylie, 1991).

[11]It is worth noting that this shift in focus from the district to the school is accompanied by parallel changes in relations between: the principal and the teaching staff (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Murphy, 1992a; Sergiovanni, 1991); teachers and students (Evertson & Murphy, 1992; Hawley, 1989; Seeley, 1980;

1988); and the school and the larger community (Murphy, 1991; Seeley, 1980; 1988).

[12]For a variety of reasons that have little to do with school-based decision making, the superintendents in this study are disgruntled with the KERA. These negative views color their perceptions of the restructuring agenda. (See Murphy, 1993b.)

[13]As Blumberg (1985) reminds us, "being the boss but not being the boss" (p. 212) or "being responsible for the behavior of others but not being able to exert direct control over that behavior . . . [has always] constitute[d] a real dilemma for superintendents" (p. 213). What the superintendents in this study seem to be saying is that they also feel a loss of much of the indirect control they had before the KERA. Restructuring will be especially traumatic for "central district administrators . . . because they will have the ultimate responsibility with relatively less authority" (Thompson, 1988, p. 25). This is a common lament of principals in restructuring districts, as well (Hallinger, Murphy, & Hausman, 1992; Murphy, in press).

[14]The theme of coaching from the sidelines has also been found in studies by Prestine (1991) and Wardzala (1993).

[15]Wardzala (1993), in a recent study of three superintendents in districts with high schools involved with the Coalition for Essential Schools, reached a similar conclusion.

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